



# NEWSLETTER

**SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS**

**SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF THE MILITARY**



## SDDVA CONTINUES TO HONOR VETERANS



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SDDVA Secretary Whitlock had the distinct honor this week to recognize two South Dakota Navy Veterans and two South Dakota Army Veterans. This honoring ceremony is in partnership with Avera and was hosted by Avera Maryhouse in Pierre. Four great veterans who proudly served their country! Four great women who supported their hero! Hooah!



# LINDNER JOINS SDDVA TEAM

Jordan Lindner recently joined the South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs team as a field service officer. Once trained, Lindner will cover the northeast corner of the state (Brown, Clark, Codington, Day, Deuel, Grant, Hamlin, Kingsbury, Marshall, Roberts, and Spink Counties and Sisseton-Wahpeton Oyate Sioux Tribe.) New territorial maps are posted below.

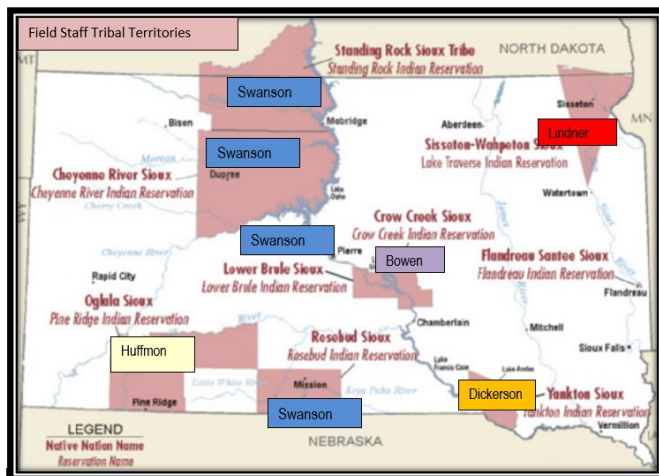
During December and January, Jordan will be traveling with Brett Dickerson and Kevin Bowen. In February he will be traveling on his own.

With each field service officer having less territory to cover, we can now help with additional outreach events, spend additional time working through claims, and being a resource when we can.

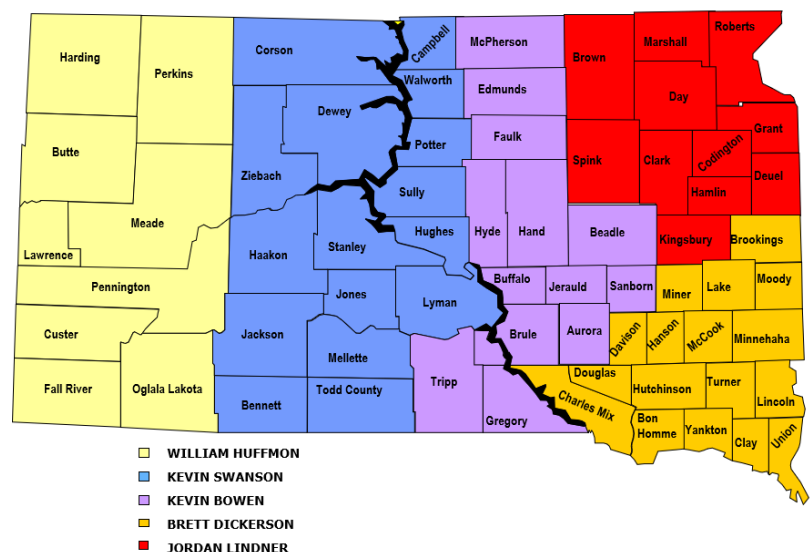
Jordan was born and raised in Watertown, SD. He graduated high school in 2007, and enlisted in the Navy in 2008 as a master at arms. He served eight years at multiple commands including US Central Command Headquarters in Tampa, FL and Strategic Communications Wing 1 in Oklahoma City, OK.



2020 Field Staff Tribal Territories

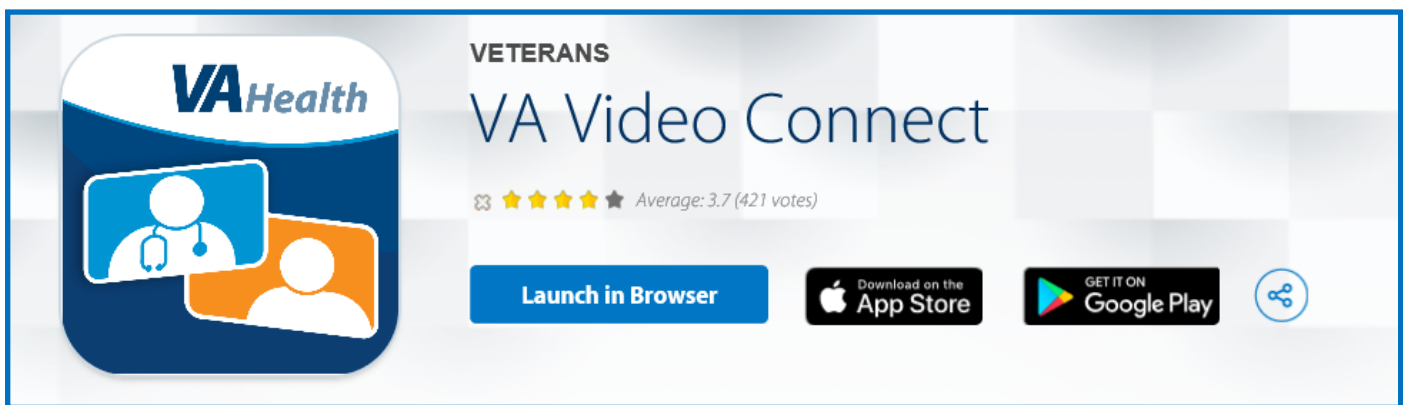


2020 FIELD STAFF COUNTY TERRITORIES



# VA'S BOARD OF VETERANS' APPEALS PLANS VIRTUAL HEARINGS IN 2020

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), Board of Veterans' Appeals (Board) and Office of Information and Technology (OIT) are working towards nationwide availability of virtual hearings for veterans next year, allowing access using their mobile phone or laptop via the [VA Video Connect](#) app.



The virtual hearings are based on the [Veterans Health Administration's tele-health platform](#) and lets veterans participate in their appeals hearings from the comfort of their homes.

“The VA strives to provide integrated solutions that leverages 21st century technology to significantly increase the number of hearings completed annually,” said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. “Giving veterans the ability to participate in secure, confidential virtual hearings is another aspect of [VA's modernization](#) to provide veterans with the ultimate customer experience.”

The testing of virtual hearings began July 2019. The collaboration with OIT, Veteran Service Organizations and other veteran representatives has been positive. To date, the Board has held 155 successful virtual hearings. Veterans who otherwise would have had to cancel their hearings were able to participate in virtual hearings and receive decisions.

[The Board of Veterans' Appeals \(Board\)](#) makes final decisions for VA regarding appeals for veterans' benefits and services. The Board's mission is to conduct hearings and issue timely decisions for veterans and other appellants in compliance with the law.

## Welcome to VA Telehealth Services

VA Telehealth Services is changing the way Veterans access VA quality care. From your home, the clinic or the hospital, telehealth technologies make it easier for you to connect with your care team and share important health information.



# HOLIDAY WREATH-LAYING TO HONOR VETERANS

The Hot Springs National Cemetery will host *Wreaths Across America*, an annual holiday wreath-laying ceremony to honor and remember our nation's veterans. The ceremony will be held Saturday, December 14, at 10:00 am (MT) at the Hot Springs National Cemetery.

The Black Hills National Cemetery will also host a *Wreaths Across America* ceremony, on Saturday, December 14, at 10:00 am (MT).

The Worcester Wreath Company, through a campaign called *Wreaths Across America*, began donating holiday wreaths in tribute to veterans laid to rest at VA national cemeteries and state veterans cemeteries in 2006. For more information, visit their website <https://www.wreathscrossamerica.org/>.

## BHSU TO HOST MILITARY/ VETERAN APPRECIATION NIGHT

Black Hills State University will be hosting Military/Veteran Appreciation Night during the upcoming BHSU Women's & Men's Basketball games on Friday, January 17th. The women's game starts at 5:30 pm and the men's at 7:30 pm.

The BHSU Basketball teams will be playing the University of Colorado at Colorado Springs at the Young Center.

All active military and veterans will receive two free tickets to the game. Just identify yourself as an active military service member or a veteran at the door.

Appreciation night is a chance for Black Hills State University to say thank you to our active military personnel and veterans who have served.

**FRIDAY, JANUARY 17TH, 2020**

**MILITARY APPRECIATION NIGHT** | All Military/Veterans will receive 2 free tickets at the door

**BHSU Basketball @ The Young Center  
vs. University of Colorado at Colorado Springs (UCCS)**

**Womens @ 5:30pm | Mens @ 7:30pm**

Persons with disabilities requesting accommodations for these events can contact Colleen Mischke (605-642-6299), email Colleen.Mischke@bhsu.edu or Brock Arundson (605-642-6882), email Brock.Arundson@bhsu.edu

# CASPER NAMED STATE CHAIR FOR STATE FUNERAL FOR WORLD WAR II VETERANS

Air Force veteran William “Bill” Casper of Rapid City has been appointed state chairman of the State Funeral for World War II Veterans organization. In 2017, the State Funeral for World War II Veterans launched a nationwide petition drive to convince President Trump to designate a state funeral in Washington, D.C., for the last surviving Medal of Honor recipient from World War II. This single state funeral would provide special recognition and serve as a final salute to the 16 million men and women who served in the armed forces from 1941 to 1945.

Medals of Honor were awarded to 473 World War II servicemen. Only two of these recipients are still living — Hershel “Woody” Williams, U.S. Marine Corp corporal, of West Virginia and Charles Coolidge, U.S. Army technical sergeant of Tennessee.

Bill Casper, the nephew of three World War II veterans and the cousin of two more, has been named state chair for South Dakota.

“Bill brings his diverse background and proven leadership experience to the role of South Dakota chair,” said Don Ballard, a Medal of Honor recipient who served in Vietnam. “The National Board of Directors joins me in welcoming Bill Casper to our leadership.” Casper served as an Air Force radar technician from 1959 to 1963. He holds degrees from Black Hills University and a Masters from Northern Arizona University.

Casper is now recruiting an eight-person State Board of Directors in South Dakota. Nominations should be emailed to [billcasper75@gmail.com](mailto:billcasper75@gmail.com) Self-nominations are welcome, as well.



Casper is also the chairman of the Veterans Honor Banner Project, which honors veterans from all conflicts by hanging banners in downtown Rapid City each year leading up to Veteran's Day. Last year 146 veterans were honored. Casper has attended eight annual conferences on World War II at the National World War II Museum in New Orleans and has provided a free lunch to numerous WW II Veterans and their families for the past seven years.

# VA IMPROVES HEALTH CARE FACILITY PERFORMANCE TRANSPARENCY

The U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs (VA) announced Dec. 11, key changes to increase transparency and ensure veterans have the best information regarding the performance of VA health care facilities.

As part of this effort, the VA will discontinue its star-rating system, making it easier for veterans to compare VA facilities with non-VA facilities in their local area.

“Star ratings were developed as an internal tool meant to compare one VA facility to another,” said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. “These ratings do not provide insight as to how our hospitals stack up against nearby non-VA facilities and are therefore of little value in helping veterans make informed health care decisions. This change will make it easier for veterans to choose the best possible care close to home, when and where they need it.”

The website home page for each VA hospital now features links to comparative tools relating to wait times, quality of medical care and patient experience ratings. This information is drawn from quality-of-care measures provided by industry-standard sources including, but not limited to the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, National Committee for Quality Assurance and the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality.

Star ratings are often misinterpreted, as they compare VA facilities by ranking them across the department’s health care system, rather than by geography, population characteristics, or unique care offerings. Additionally, veterans in VA focus groups have indicated they do not consult the star ratings in making decisions about VA care.

The National Quality Forum’s, Nov. 6 issue brief, Hospital Quality Star Rating Summit, points out, star ratings of health care facilities can often misrepresent an assessment of overall hospital quality, “leading consumers to choose hospitals that were not the best at delivering the care they needed...when they might have been the best place for a person with a particular condition to receive care.”

While VA has published star ratings for the final time, the department will continue to make public its own detailed, [Strategic Analytics for Improvement and Learning \(SAIL\)](#) data, to monitor and internally manage hospital system performance within the Veterans Health Administration. SAIL assesses more than 60 quality metrics in areas such as death rates, complications, safety and patient satisfaction, as well as overall efficiency and physician capacity at individual VA Medical Centers.

In accordance with Government Accountability Office recommendations, in [2017](#) and [2019](#), these changes will help veterans navigate the many new choices available to them under the [MISSION Act](#), a landmark law that puts veterans at the center of their health care decisions.

# VA, WALMART OPEN TELEHEALTH LOCATIONS TO SERVE VETERANS IN RURAL AREAS

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and Walmart cut the ribbon in Asheboro, North Carolina, Dec. 10, for a new VA-led [Accessing Telehealth through Local Area Stations \(ATLAS\)](#) services pilot location.

## ATLAS

### Offering Veterans VA Care Closer to Home

The public-private affiliation provides convenient health care to veterans in their communities.

“This type of collaboration is the way of the future,” said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. “Veterans need the expansion of choice, and this partnership is vital to affording them convenient access to VA health care services where they live.”

Walmart has donated equipment and space at five sites as part of a pilot initiative allowing veterans to meet with a VA provider in a private room via video technology. VA telehealth clinical services vary by location and may include: primary care, nutrition, mental health and social work.

“As both a veteran of the Air Force and a father whose son and son-in-law are serving, I know firsthand how important support and access is for our military, especially when it comes to health care,” said Chief Growth Officer for Walmart U.S. Health and Wellness, Daryl Risinger. “Walmart is committed to making quality health care affordable and accessible and is working with the VA to expand its ability to serve veterans through technology. This is another way we are helping our communities live better.”

This new option makes the VA care easier to access and eases the burden of long travel times to appointments. The VA leads the nation in telehealth services. Last fiscal year, there were more than 1.3 million video telehealth encounters with more than 490,000 veterans. Other telehealth pilot sites are in Wisconsin, Michigan and Iowa.

# GRAND OPENING AT NEW VA CBOC IN WATERTOWN

Veterans, community leaders and elected officials gathered in Watertown last week for the official grand opening and ribbon cutting ceremony for the VA's new community based outpatient clinic.

CBOCs provide the most common outpatient services, including health and wellness visits, without the hassle of visiting a larger medical center,

SDDVA Secretary Whitlock attended the celebration and was afforded a great opportunity to visit with many veterans, as well as see first-hand, what the new facility has to offer.

The new CBOC is located at 4 19th Street NE and provides the following services: primary care, couriered lab services, psychiatry, anticoagulation clinic, home-based primary care, audiology services, and telehealth for numerous specialty services. The Watertown CBOC provides services to more than 1,700 veterans in a nine-county area.



## SAVE THE DATE JANUARY 18 Military Family Carnival and Resource Fair



The military family lives and breathes the sacrifices our service members make every day. We can do our part by creating a solid community foundation to honor that sacrifice.

**Connect and Celebrate at Bridging the Gap Festival.**

**Central Church, 2628 W Ralph Rogers Rd, Sioux Falls, SD • January 18 from 11am-5pm**



# UPCOMING EVENTS

Dec 23-25—State Offices Closed

2020

Jan 1—State Offices Closed

Jan 14—State of the State Address

Jan 15—SD Veterans Council Legislative Reception

Jan 17—BHSU Military Appreciation Night - BHSU Young Center—Spearfish—5:30 pm (MT)

Jan 18—Military Family Carnival and Resource Fair—Central Church (2628 W. Ralph Rogers Rd)—Sioux Falls—11:00 am—5:00 pm (CT)

Feb 21-23—American Legion Mid Winter Conference—Arrowwood Resort and Conference Center—Oacoma

Mar 25—SD Veterans Council Meeting—PVA Headquarters—Sioux Falls—10:00 am (CT)

Mar 27-29—SD Vietnam and Era Veterans Reunion—Dakota Sioux Casino—Watertown

May 15-17—DAV State Convention—Brookings

May 30—Midwest Honor Flight—Mission 7

Jun 18-21—American legion State Convention—Huron

Sep 10—Midwest Honor Flight—Mission 8 (Tentative)

Oct 11—Midwest Honor Flight—Mission 9 (Tentative)

## Did you know?

U.S. regulators are setting up a new three-digit number to reach a suicide prevention hotline. Similar to 911 for emergencies, people will need to dial 988 to seek help, once it's implemented. Currently, the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline uses a 10-digit number, 800-273-TALK. Callers are routed to one of 163 crisis centers, where counselors answered 2.2 million calls last year. Thursday's vote by the Federal Communications Commission starts the months-long process to set up 988. The next step is a comment period before the FCC moves to an order.



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